

NORTHAMPTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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SCHOOL COMMITTEE

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John A. Provost, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Nick Bernier
Business Administrator

September 10, 2021

Dear NPS Community:

Last night, the Northampton School Committee amended the district's Face Covering Policy. Under the revised policy, "if it is possible to enforce physical distancing during recess, masks may be optional. However, if students are within 6 feet of each other while playing, even for short times, masks must be worn." Our experience during the first weeks of school has shown that it is not practical to enforce 6-foot physical distancing while students are at recess. **Given the change to the policy, the Northampton Public Schools will require students to wear face coverings at recess beginning on September 13th.** The policy update also clarifies that the only acceptable masks are snugly fitting disposable surgical masks or cloth masks with two or more layers of tightly woven fabric.

Students will still be provided with mask breaks and be able to unmask during outdoor classes where teachers can provide physical distancing. At the same meeting, the School Committee also mandated that all district staff be vaccinated against COVID-19 by October 22nd, with appropriate accommodations for staff with medical conditions or sincerely held religious beliefs, observances or practices. **Let us take the opportunity to once again encourage eligible students to be vaccinated.** We have already experienced three COVID-related events in the schools this year. Vaccinated individuals have been able to return to school on an expedited basis. In addition to providing highly-effective protection against infection and serious illness, receiving the vaccine will minimize the interruptions to learning for students who have been exposed to the virus.

We would also take the opportunity to encourage participation in our COVID testing program. We are working with our testing vendor to set up schedules for those who have provided consent. If you have not already provided consent via the hard copy forms sent home at the beginning of the year, you will have another opportunity to provide consent electronically via a link that will be posted on our district website next week. We will begin routine covid safety check testing (formally called pooled testing) by the end of the month. Our district will also be providing symptomatic testing with the Abbott BinaxNOW antigen test. Further information will be provided to caregivers and staff closer to the implementation of the program.

We hope that future developments will bring new information that allows us to relax our health and safety practices, but our first priority is to do whatever it takes to keep our students and staff safe and to keep our schools open. We also know that our students have responded with grace and resilience to all that has been asked of them over the past 18 months. That gives us confidence that you will step up once again and do what needs to be done to keep our community safe.

Sincerely,


John A. Provost, Ed.
Superintendent of Schools


Lisa Safron, BSN, RN, NCSN
Director of Health, Safety & Equity Programs